

Talking points

Lauderdale County Sheriff's Department Accreditation Ceremony

Meridian

July 5, 2007

Thank you, Sheriff Sollie, for that introduction. What a great day for law enforcement in Lauderdale County, east-central Mississippi and the entire state.

Sheriff, Marsha and I are proud of you, the sworn officers and in fact all of the personnel in the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Department for your willingness to accept this challenge. You have successfully completed a difficult assignment and brought tremendous credit to yourselves and your profession.

We're also proud of this community at-large. I think history shows – and if it doesn't it should – that local law enforcement is most successful when it works with a supportive community. There's a lot more to law enforcement than locking people up, even though putting criminals behind bars is an absolutely necessary element.

The best law enforcement and the safest communities reflect real partnerships deeply rooted in respect, and respect springs from professional standards backed up by community standards.

The best law enforcement doesn't just arrest criminals ... it deters crime with the certain knowledge that criminal behavior will be punished.

For too long, too much of the focus has been on the criminal, and not enough focus has been on the law enforcement officer.

In some instances, criminals have become like folk heroes when in fact there is nothing heroic in criminal behavior. The real heroism comes from the dangerous, tough work done by law enforcement officers ... people like you who put your lives on the line every day as a public service to your community.

The mission of law enforcement is to protect public safety. Building safer communities has been a mission of mine since the beginning of my term as Governor. That should come as no surprise because before I took office state leadership was not focused on stopping the crime epidemic, especially the epidemic caused by drugs.

For example, the previous administration cut the budget for drug law enforcement by 41%, even though nearly 80% of crime is drug-related.

Today, we're giving law enforcement officers more tools to fight crime.

At the state level, we've intensified investigations and prosecutions for drug crimes.

New Highway Patrol schools have put more Troopers on the highways to enforce traffic laws and assist local agencies wherever possible.

At my request, new laws were passed to toughen punishment on felons found in possession of a firearm or who use a firearm during the commission of any additional felony.

These are not gun control laws, these are criminal control laws that will make it easier for law officers and prosecutors to efficiently put and keep some of our most dangerous criminals behind bars.

Make no mistake: Serious times require serious steps. In order to meet the strenuous demands of law enforcement, officers must function at the highest degree of professionalism.

You've earned the designation. You deserve the honor. Enjoy the recognition. In a few minutes you'll go back out into a community that needs your professionalism 24/7.

Congratulations on setting a higher standard, and thank you for your service.

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